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Our Cherished Doctrine

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In *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, Dale Ratzlaff encourages the Adventist church to abandon its sanctuary/judgment doctrine and to join evangelicals in proclaiming the true gospel. He regards our sanctuary doctrine as a "sliver in the foot" which destroys spirituality and acceptance of grace through faith by promoting paranoid, perfectionistic legalism.

Ratzlaff, a former Adventist minister, attacks the Adventist sanctuary doctrine from several angles. He associates our interpretation of the 2300 day prophecy (Dan 8:14) with wild proof-texting of William Miller, whose views spawned our movement. He argues that our approach to the 2300 days is based on a series of unverified "assumptions." He attacks the credibility of

Ellen White, upon whose authority our sanctuary doctrine must rest if it cannot be established from the Bible. He questions the integrity of Adventist treatment of doctrinal issues, and he points out that today some Adventists are theologically divided to the extent that they hold mutually exclusive positions. Perhaps most potent is the way in which Ratzlaff chronicles his exodus from the Adventist church to illustrate his claim that our sanctuary doctrine is damaging and incompatible with biblical salvation theology.

No Adventist can argue with Ratzlaff's experience. It is a fact that our sanctuary doctrine as understood by him has caused him pain. Many can resonate with him. In graduate school, as a student of an authority on Leviticus, I grappled with the sanctuary in the Hebrew text for eight years before I felt really comfortable remaining a Seventh-day Adventist. I am grateful to God that I had the opportunity to study deeply enough not only to have my questions answered, but also to get in touch with Jesus where he is now, in his sanctuary in heaven (Heb 7-10; cp. Ps 11:4).

I agree with Ratzlaff when he emphasizes the foundational nature of the sanctuary doctrine for Adventist theology. However, while his purpose is to argue for thorough reformation of our theology through removal of this doctrine, I find that sound exegesis points in the opposite direction: we should cherish the sanctuary because it accurately reflects righteousness by faith.



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For his biblical objections to our sanctuary doctrine, Ratzlaff relies heavily on issues raised by Desmond Ford almost two decades ago. Ford's questions were good ones, and they have stimulated a lot of Adventist research, such as the Daniel and Revelation Committee (DARCOM) series edited by Frank Holbrook. Ratzlaff acknowledges these works in his bibliography, but for some unexplained reason his discussion does not take their arguments into account. Thus his critique is more a reaction to the situation as it stood near the beginning of the 1980s than it is an accurate appraisal of current Adventist scholarship. We have more work to do, but we are making progress, which Ratzlaff should recognize.

If Ratzlaff is arousing more interest in the sanctuary than the DARCOM series did, it is because his book is controversial and easily comprehended by non-scholarly readers. The DARCOM series is full of Hebrew and Greek exegesis which even our M.Div. students at the Seminary have difficulty following. In order to bridge the gap between scholars and lay people, we need more books like Clifford Goldstein's *1844 Made Simple*.

To support the idea that our sanctuary doctrine deserves to be studied rather than buried, I would like to suggest some possible answers to a few of the points which Ratzlaff has raised.

2300 "Days"

Ratzlaff (page 176) follows Ford in questioning our interpretation of "2300 days" in Daniel 8:14 on the ground that the Hebrew reads literally "evening morning 2300," which many scholars understand in light of verse 26 ("the evening and the morning") as 2300 half days, i.e. 1150 full days. By comparing the syntax of Daniel 8:14, 26 with Hebrew expressions for time elsewhere, I have found that the number 2300 applies to both "evening" and "morning" as an abbreviation for "evenings 2300 and mornings 2300." Therefore, just as "forty days and forty nights" (Gen 7:4, 12, etc.) refers to forty full days, Daniel 8:14 refers to 2300 full days.

Atonement Not Completed at the Cross

Whereas the Adventist sanctuary doctrine indicates that atonement was not completed at the cross, Ratzlaff affirms the evangelical position that atonement was completed at the cross (pp. 219-222). Adventists would agree that Christ's death was the one and only atoning sacrificial death (Heb 9:28; cp. Jn 19:30—"It is finished"). All atonement, i.e. reconciliation between sinners and their God, flows from Calvary. But was that the end of the process of atonement? If atonement is relational in that it deals with reconciliation between two parties, how can we receive atonement from a historical event which occurred almost two thousand years ago unless we experience a changed relationship with God on the basis of the event? As long as relationships are being healed, atonement is continuing. This concept agrees with the following biblical evidence:

1. Paul said: "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished" (1 Cor 15:17-18; NRSV). Christ's resurrection, after his death on the cross, is essential for salvation.

2. In Hebrews 7-10, Christ ministers after his ascension as

our high priest in the true sanctuary in heaven, an activity which was foreshadowed by the ancient Israelite sanctuary. There he appears "in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24). Having obtained eternal redemption for us by his own blood (vs. 12), he uses his blood (cp. vs. 13—"sprinkling") to "purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God" (vs. 14; NRSV). In other words, Christ died to make abundant provision for the salvation of all human beings, and then he distributes/applies the transforming benefit. By way of analogy, Christ puts the money in the bank (by his death) and then he writes checks to people from that account (by his mediation). For us to receive the benefit of salvation, provision and distribution are both necessary.

3. In agreement with New Testament evidence for the way in which we are saved by Christ's blood, ancient Israelite sacrifices for sin included personal involvement of sinners and

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priestly mediation as essential components. A common Israelite sinner was required to bring a female goat or sheep to the sanctuary, lean his/her hand on the head of the animal, and slay it. Then the priest applied its blood to the altar and burned its suet/fat on the altar (Lev 4:27-35). The ritual is summarized: "and the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven" (Lev 4:31, RSV; cp. vs. 35). Atonement was not completed by slaughter of the animal at the hand of the sinner, which pointed forward to Christ's death. Death provided the blood which made possible priestly mediation, which is called a work of "atonement." Mediation was part of the atoning sacrifice. Since Christ's sacrifice fulfills the meaning of the animal sacrifices (Jn. 1:29), we should include Christ's mediation as an essential part of his sacrifice rather than regarding it as a separate phase. Does the idea that atonement was not completed at the cross diminish the sacrifice and atonement of Christ? Absolutely not! We magnify what Christ is doing! Christ's sac-

rifice and atonement are much bigger than they are commonly thought to be!

4. When an Israelite received complete forgiveness from God through a sacrifice which pointed forward to Christ's sacrifice (e.g. Lev 4:31, 35), that was not the end of the process of atonement. Atonement is larger than forgiveness. There was a further phase of atonement on the "Day of Atonement" (Lev 23:27-28). On this day, Israelites who had already been forgiven were now "cleansed" (Lev 16:30) through purification of the sanctuary from their sins (Lev 16:16, 33-34). Until the Day of Atonement, forgiven sins affected God in the sense that he could be regarded as unjust because he had forgiven guilty sinners (cp. 2 Sam 14:9). But the Day of Atonement reaffirmed God's forgiveness by vindicating the justice of his mercy. However, Israelites who were rebellious and/or failed to accept

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the provisions which he offered during the year and on the Day of Atonement were sentenced to divine punishment (e.g. Lev 20:3; Num 15:30-31; Num 19:13, 20; Lev 23:29, 30). So the Day of Atonement was a judgment which separated people who were disloyal to God from those who were loyal. Therefore the Day was an appropriate foreshadowing of an end-time judgment (Dan 7:9-14; cp. 8:14) which benefits God's true people (Dan 7:22, 27) and condemns those who persist in opposition to God (Dan 7:11, 26; 8:25).

Faith, Works, and Judgment

Ratzlaff reacts to the Adventist teaching that we are judged on the basis of our works: "This teaching, perhaps more than any other, undermines the new covenant gospel of grace:" (page 210). What is the role of works in the context of the judgment?

First, the Bible is crystal clear regarding our salvation: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that

no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9, NRSV). Whatever the purpose of the judgment, it cannot put salvation by works in place of salvation by grace through faith.

Adventists teach that the purpose of the judgment is to vindicate God. But Romans 3:25-26 says that Christ's sacrifice already proves that God is just when he justifies those who have faith in Jesus. There is no contradiction, however, because God is just when he justifies those who have faith in Jesus (cp. Eph 2:8). God cannot save a person who does not have true faith or who abandons faith after receiving forgiveness (cp. Jn 3:18; Col 1:23).

The judgment should identify God's true people on the basis of their faith. But since only God can read thoughts (cp. Ps 139:23), the judgment must use evidence for faith which can be witnessed by created beings if they are to be assured that God is just and that saved human beings will not continue to function as self-replicating moral viruses.

Thus the judgment considers records of works (Eccl 12:14; cp. Dan 7:10) which show whether or not living faith exists (James 2:26; Gal 5:6). The point is not the works themselves, but whether or not a person has true faith.

The judgment is not about who has sinned. All have sinned (Rom 3:23), so distinctions between people cannot be made on this basis. The judgment is about who is forgiven. For those who are forgiven, it is to reaffirm their assurance, not to take it away. Compare the fact that on the Day of Atonement the Israelite high priest did not cleanse the sanctuary by wiping off bloodstains from earlier sacrifices. Rather, he placed more blood (Lev 16:14-19), representing Christ's blood, in several of the same places (cp. Lev 4:6-7, 17-18, 25, 30, 34), thereby reaffirming the forgiveness already granted.

Jesus expressed the need for a sinner to continue accepting forgiveness by maintaining loyalty to him and his law of love. He said to the woman taken in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (Jn 8:11; NRSV). He also told a parable about an unjust steward who was forgiven but repudiated his pardon when he failed to extend forgiveness to his fellow servant (Matt 18:23-34). Forgiveness which involves no moral change and which cannot reproduce itself for the benefit of others is not true forgiveness of the kind which God gives. Fortunately for us, we are not left on our own to change ourselves. Because Christ gives us peace with God (Rom 5:1), his love, the basic attitude of his character and his law, is poured into our hearts through his Spirit (Rom 5:5; cp. 1 Jn 4:8; Matt 22:36-40). Thus genuine, ongoing obedience is a gift of grace bought by the blood of Christ and received through faith (cp. Jude vs. 24).

In this brief response I can do little more than offer a general reaction, give a few examples, and express the hope that people will seek answers to Ratzlaff's questions by studying the Bible and testing Adventist study materials for themselves. I agree with Ratzlaff that if the Adventist sanctuary doctrine is an unbiblical skeleton in our theological closet, we should bury it. But thus far, the more I study the more biblical support and practical relevance I find for the Adventist approach to the sanctuary.